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THE ETYMOLOGY OF GOSPEL.

THE derivation of this word forms the subject of two notes in this periodical. In the April number of 1889 (at col. 208), Dr. Bright tries to show that "the first element of the compound is *God*, not *good*." A supplementary communication—not of any essential import—will be found in the February number of 1890. Furthermore, we shall have to take cognizance of the views expressed by Prof. Skeat in his 'Etymological Dict.' (Skeat¹), in his supplement to the same (Skeat²) and in his 'Principles of English Etymology,' first series (Skeat³). As it will be necessary for the right application of my contention that the reader should have, at least, the greater part of the evidence before his eyes, I may be pardoned for reproducing testimonies and argument, all of which have been printed before, partly even in this same periodical.

The oldest instances—such as those found in Old English Poetry, see Grein *in voce*—may here be safely ignored. The form *godspell*, without any sign of length or vowel shortness and which seems the only one found there, does not, of course, decide in favor of either view. The eleventh and twelfth centuries yield, what is considered better testimony.

We have, first of all, the eleventh century gloss: "*Euangelium, id est, bonum nuntium, godspel*" (not *-ll* as Bright has it), Wright-Wülker, 314, 8,—see also Zupitza, 'Aelfric's Grammatik und Glossar,' p. 304. Skeat² considers this "a reasonable alteration," perhaps looking upon it as at first blush indicative of the derivation from *gód*. However this be, he still sticks to the view that the *o* was originally short. Dr. Bright objects to Skeat's qualifying as an alteration, what is merely "the subjective interpretation of an allegorizing monk." This means, if anything, that no importance attaches to this gloss. Then, how can Bright call this an "important factor"?

The fact is that, as I may here remark at once, the value of this gloss is just *nil*. More has been read into it than in may safely be taken to prove. *Bonum nuntium* which has been taken to indicate the glossator's derivation of *godspel* is merely to be looked upon as a translation of *euangelium*.

It is strange that Dr. Bright who disputes

the evidence of this eleventh century testimony, should adduce another.¹ I shall not transcribe this passage which must be looked up, *ante*, 1890, col. 91. It seems to me that this passage again proves nothing. It is true that the spelling *gódspell*² seems to point to the homilist's deriving it from *gód*, but we also find here the words: *Godspell is witodlice godes sylfes lár. 7 þa word þe he spræc*, etc., which, surely, may be adduced with equal force to 'prove' that the writer looked upon the *ð* as short.

The third testimony is found in the 'Ormulum,' Ded. l. 157 ff., we find: *Goddspell onn Enugliss nennmedd iss God word 7 god tippennde, Goderrnde*, etc. (see the whole of the passage in White, Holt's ed. i.) So, as Dr. Bright remarks, there is a discrepancy between Orm's pronunciation and his derivation or explanation. Orm thought *god* originally *gód*, but evidently pronounced *gódspell*. Dr. Bright looks upon this as favoring his *gðd* derivation. For, as the *ð* in Orm's time is evidently short, and as in order to account for its having become short, "the process of reducing (its) quantity (must be) placed earlier than can be admitted by the laws of Anglo-Saxon grammar," his natural inference is that the *o* was short. Relying on one or more of these testimonies, and on other arguments too—such as the parallel forms *gotspel* in O.H.G. and *guð-spfjall* in Icelandic (not **guot-* and **gðð-*). Profs. Skeat and Bright, Grein and others have decided the one in favor of *gðd*, the other in that of *gód* as being originally the first element of the compound under consideration. Thus for Skeat¹ the *o* was originally short. Skeat² evidently wavers, and as to Skeat³ the eleventh century gloss has been too much for him. "At first this word was *gódspell*." Greine's view (*ð*) is influenced by, nay, ap-

¹He does so "for such as are disposed to judge of the matter rather on such evidence than from the earlier history of the word." No evidence of what its earlier history was, is forthcoming.—I must add here that I believe Dr. Bright to be in error when he thinks that the extract quoted (was at that time) unprinted. See the London *Academy*, Oct. 5, 1889, p. 221.

²As Dr. Bright has "disgarded the . . . word-division of the manuscript," I must add that here the MS. really has *gódspell* in one word, and not *god spell*. Mr. Frank Bickley of the British Museum was good enough to look this up for me.

parently due to the O.H.G. and Icelandic forms. Bright, as we have seen, thinks the δ short.

It will be noticed that all investigators merely argue from the point of view of the form-history of the word.

Now, let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that *gōdspell* was the original form. It can hardly be denied that in all probability—in fact, I am convinced that we may say with certainty—popular etymology would have taken hold of the word, and made it into *gōdspell*, that is, some people would have come to look upon it as the word of God (that is, Christ or the father). On the other hand, this change in meaning and in pronunciation need not have operated at once in everybody's mind. Some people for a longer or shorter time would continue to speak of *gōdspell*. If, on the other hand, with the same reservation, we assume that *gōdspell* were the original form, what do we see? With as much certainty we may expect popular etymology to have seized upon it and to have made it into *gōdspell*. Again: some people would continue to make the δ short.

Circumstances have given this word a singular adaptability to "popular etymology," which has unfortunately quite obscured its original "form-history." I quote this word on purpose from a preceding sentence so as to show that, and why, I think those investigators on the wrong scent, who have tried to argue from this point of view. It is true that mostly it leads to success, but I hope to make it clear that for once we must leave this safe path and enter upon one of conjecture. It must be perfectly clear that all support of either view propounded, and all opposition to them when founded on "grammar," that is, on organic changes, can be of no value, since all traces of the latter have entirely disappeared.

No doubt, this position is a very easy one to take up. We simply have the air of bidding good-bye to all guiding rules, and thus to boldly admit conjecture as a determining factor of word-investigators seems, at first sight, to be defying all accepted canons of criticism. I would, therefore, have it distinctly understood that such a proceeding is not to

be taken recourse to, in my opinion, save under very exceptional circumstances. These seem to me to be present in our case. Nor is the conjecture such a very hazardous one. We shall have to dismiss any considerations of form, but we shall not be left entirely without guidance.

I must here state that, in my opinion, the *o* of *gōdspell* was undoubtedly originally long. In order to arrive at this conclusion we have simply to ask ourselves this question: By whom and when was the need first felt of using the word, and under what circumstances? Undoubtedly by clerics, by learned men, therefore, at a time when Christianity began to spread to Teutonic countries. But the main interest of our question centres in the answer to its last part, namely, in which aspect must we suppose the first employers of the word to have viewed the matter, and whence did they draw the gospels, that is whence did they get the *word*? As they must have become acquainted with the scriptures either in Latin or Greek, the ultimate source is decidedly Greek *εὐαγγέλιον*, that is, *bonum nuntium*, that is, *gōd spell*.

Moreover did they view the gospel more especially as the life of Jesus Christ, the message which he was therein represented as having given to the world, in other words, was the fact of its being the story of his life and doctrines—"Godes sylfes lār 7 þa word þe he spræc"—the foremost circumstance which must have struck those who first needed the word in their *vernacular*? If so, there would be some reason to suppose that *gōdspell* also suggested itself to them. Or was it not so much the Saviour's life as such, as rather the joyous character of his message of peace and love by which this 'spell' would strike the early devotees of Christianity?

The answer, it would seem to me, must here clearly be affirmative. I hence look upon *gōdspell* as a translation of *euangelium*.

Even if this could not be granted, I venture to think that *a-priori* reasons speak in favor of the word being formed independently with a view to expressing the glad, joyous message. I hence look upon the original length of the \bar{o} as being established.

The O. H. G. and Scandinavian forms, as

well as Orm's *dd* point to the second stage of form-development. This stage can have been reached solely through popular etymology, and objections to this hypothesis founded on arguments concerning organic changes, such as that of Dr. Bright need carry no weight.³

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A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED TEXT
OF THE "ÉVANGILE AUX
FEMMES."

SINCE writing the paper on the "Évangile aux Femmes," of which an abstract was printed in MOD. LANG. NOTES for Jan., 1893, cols. 35-37, I have been so fortunate as to obtain a very satisfactory copy (made by E. Klis, Paris) of a version of the poem which has never before been published; namely, that of the Epinal MS., no. 189, f^o. 37 r^o.—f^o. 37 v^o. (formerly known as no. 59).

This MS. was mentioned by Franz Joseph Mone in his *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit*, v (1836), col. 58; a short description of it is given in 'Catalogue Général des Mss. des Bibl. Publiques des Départements,' iii (1861), p. 422, where it is known as no. 59; finally, François Bonnardot gave an extremely detailed account of the MS. in *Bulletin de la Soc. des Anc. Textes Français*, 1876, pp. 64-134, where he prints six verses of our poem.

L. Constans gives a few variant readings

from this MS. in *Ztsch. f. Roman. Phil.*, viii, pp. 24-36; and these, together with the six verses given by Bonnardot, constitute what has hitherto been published of this text. Bonnardot has established the date of 1462 as approximately that of the portion of the MS. containing our poem; the MS. was written in Metz by various members of the Desch family, and is mostly a collection of poems which seem to have struck the writer's fancy and were, therefore, transcribed as he met with them in his reading from time to time.

The quatrains of our poem transcribed by him appear to have been selected from some longer version in accordance with his usual practice. There is, moreover, a gap at the end of the preceding piece, which seems to include the first portion of our poem, which now begins at the top of the recto of a folio, and is without a title of any sort; probably a whole folio has been lost here, and with it, I imagine, about three or four quatrains of our poem (this last surmise was arrived at by comparison with the other versions of the poem).

The text itself is interesting as a specimen of the Lorraine dialect in the fifteenth century, seemingly much influenced by the forms of colloquial language. In the text as given below, I have enclosed in parentheses all resolutions of the abbreviated forms found in the MS.

Constans, 'Chrest. de l'Anc. Français,' 2d ed., pp. 199-201, may be compared.

BIBL. D'ÉPINAL, MS. No. 189.

f^o. 37 r^o.

Moult puet est(re) hom(m)e ioeuz (et) fai(r)e chi(er)e lie
qu(a)nt fe(m)e lait a cure (et) ver lui sumelie
hu(m)ble (com) berbix et con lion herdie
bien doit estre lvy ho(m)me appelle fol si fie

³ Lack of space compels me to withhold my comment on Dr. Logeman's argument for our next number.—J.W.B.